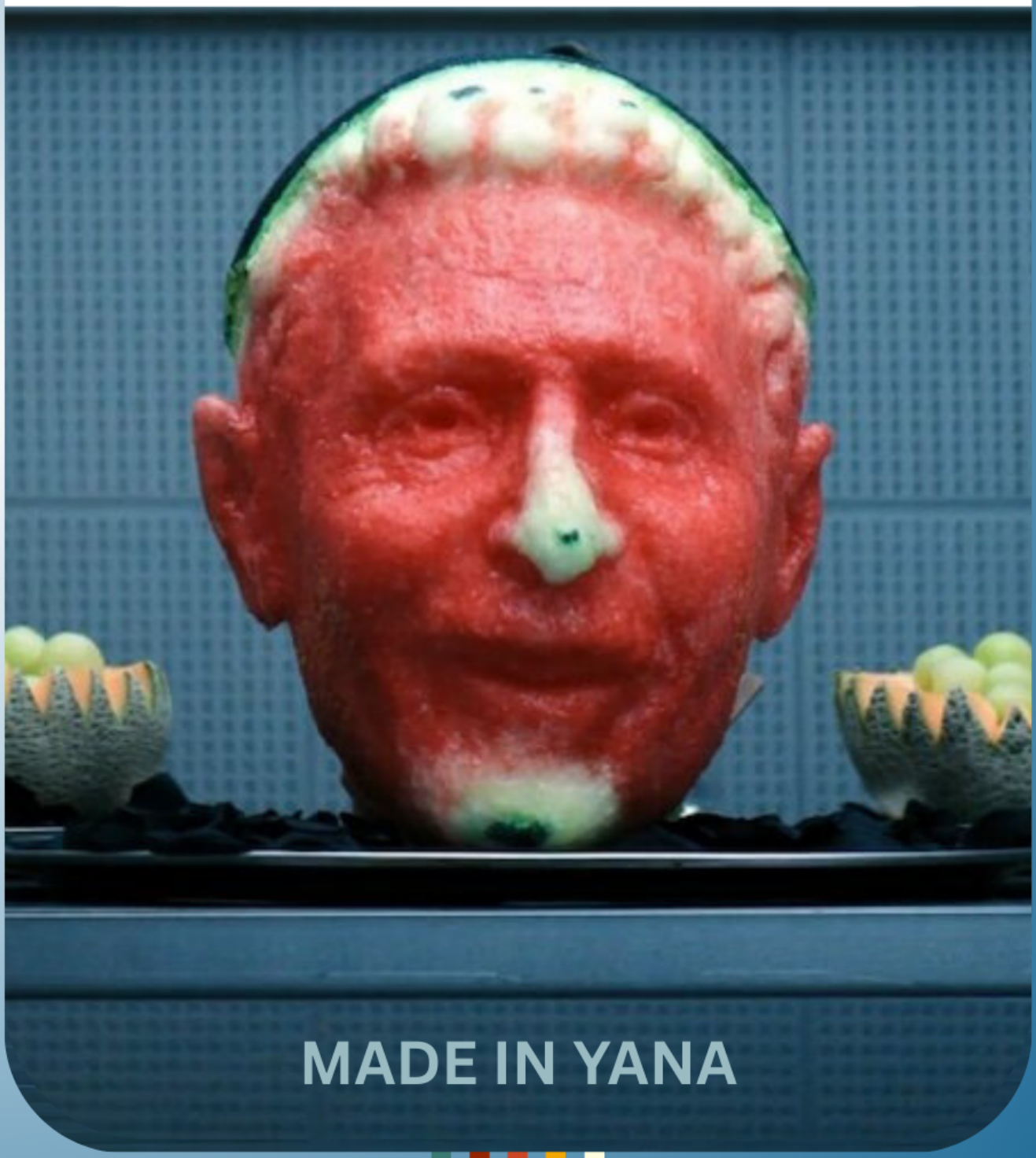
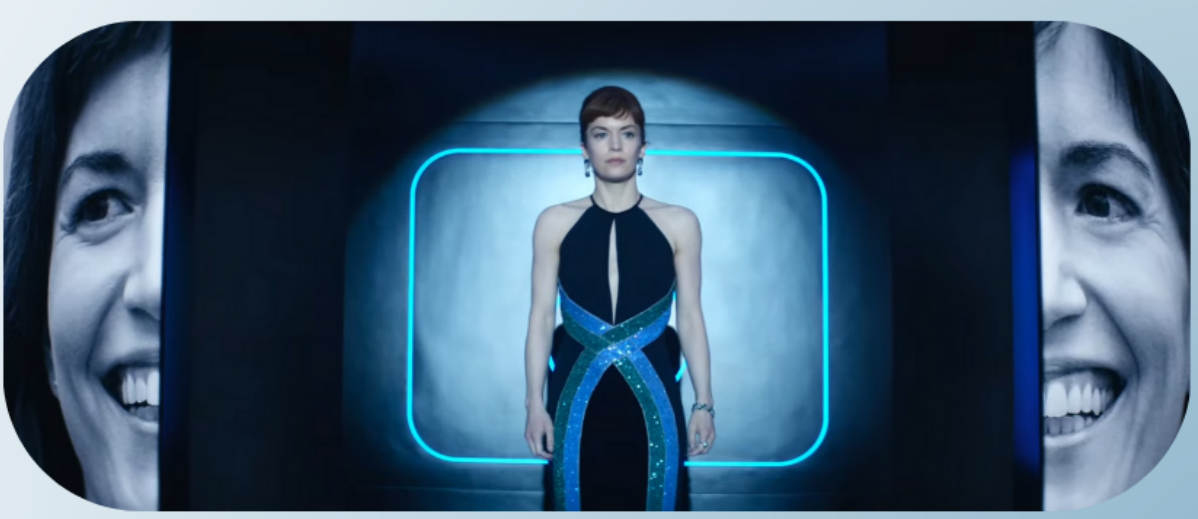
~~Severance~~ Package

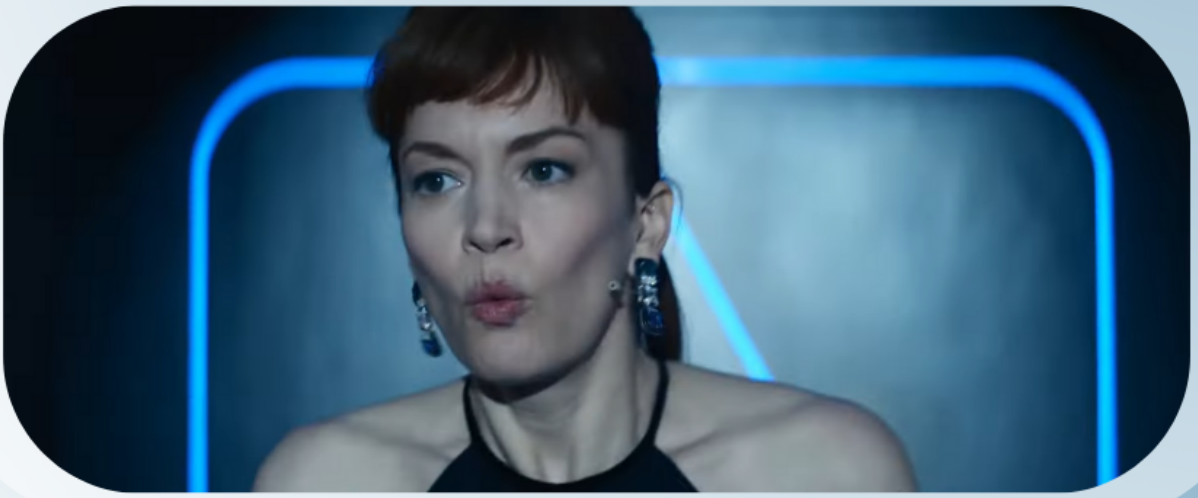


INTRODUCTION



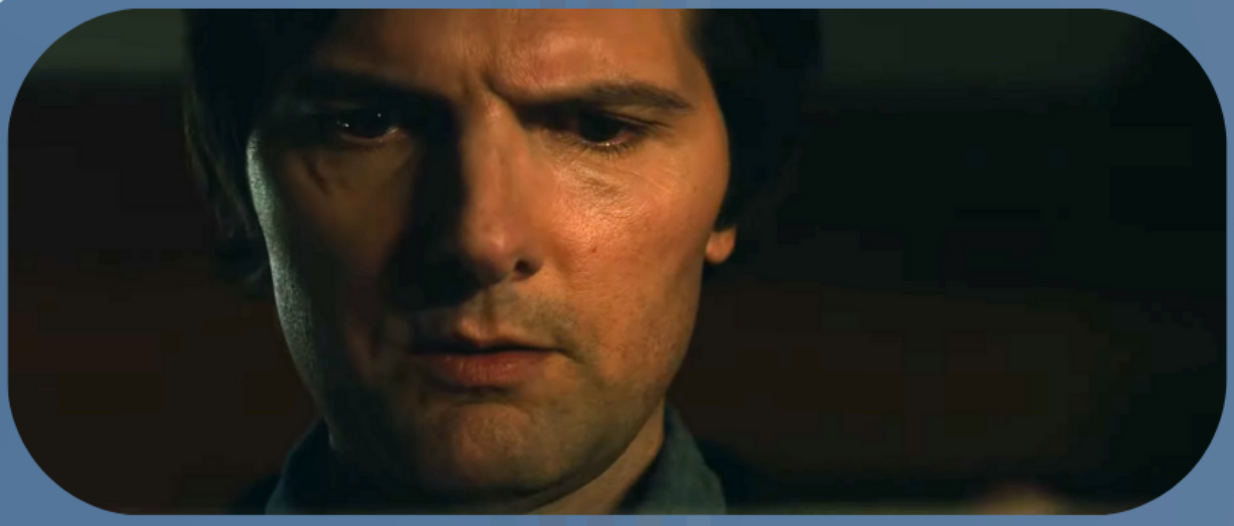
Room full of people. All of them taking their places for the conference. Two minutes before the first presentation, I pass around my Termination Letter.

The zine tells my coworkers about the dehumanizing treatment I received as an international worker advocating for fair company policies at the company.



I tell people:

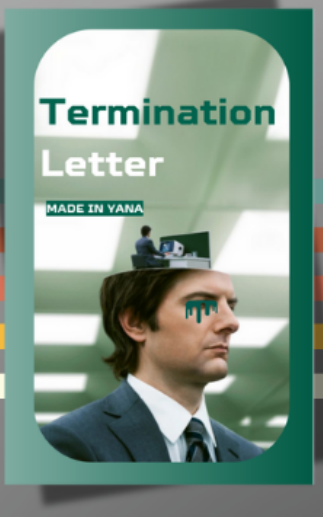
This is for you.
Read this on your own time later,
let's focus on the presentations right now.



I go to the back table, and hear two envelopes ripping behind me. Someone says out loud "oh, this is serious". A few minutes later, he lightly bumps me on the shoulder and says:

Holy shit, girl.

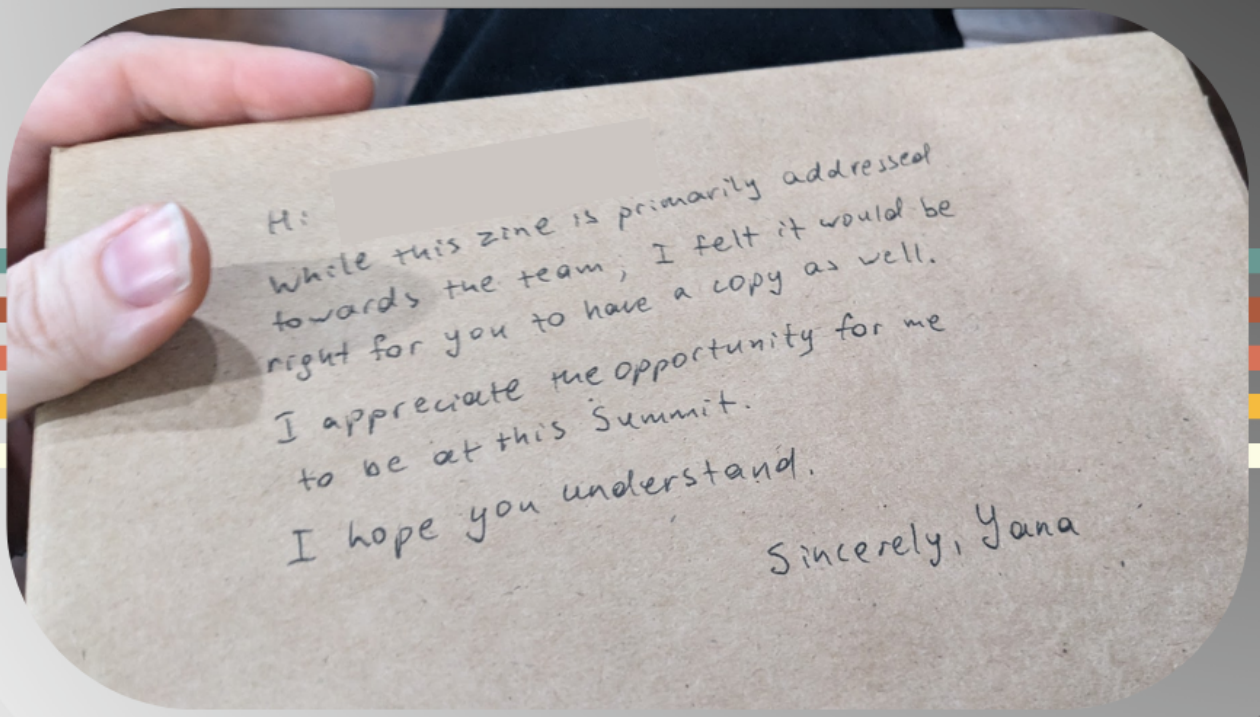
above: zines fresh from the printers



above: Termination Letter (anonymized)

During the first hour of the conference, I specifically hold on to the zines for the middle manager and the department manager (let's name him Trent).

I sign their zines with the following:


Hi
While this zine is primarily addressed towards the team, I felt it would be right for you to have a copy as well.
I appreciate the opportunity for me to be at this Summit.
I hope you understand.
Sincerely, Yana

above: signed zine for the department manager

When the first hour of presentations passes though, my coworker says:

Trent was reading it behind your back.

I turn around and see him with the zine. **He took someone else's copy and read it before I could give it to him.** I still give him the envelope, but he doesn't make eye contact.

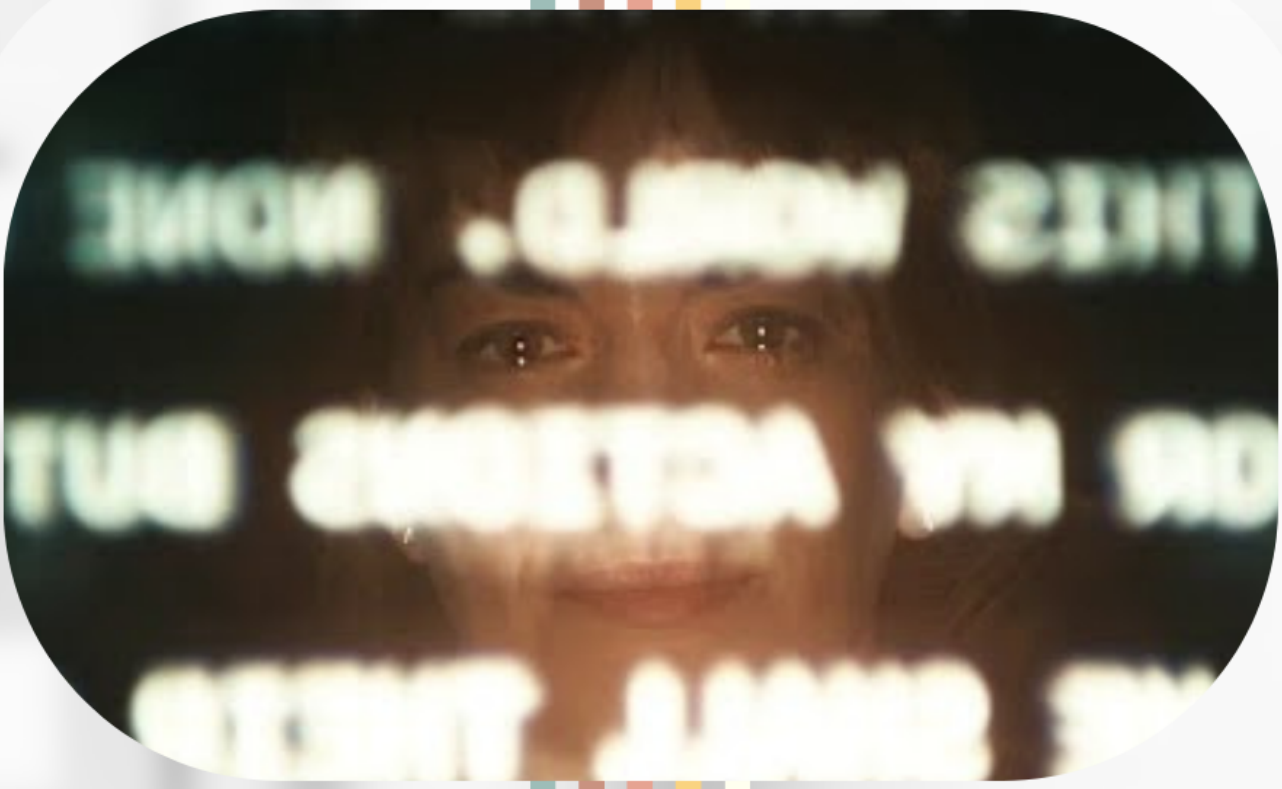
I tell my coworker:

My soul is leaving my body.

She says “you make it look easy”.
I go into the bathroom to calm myself down.

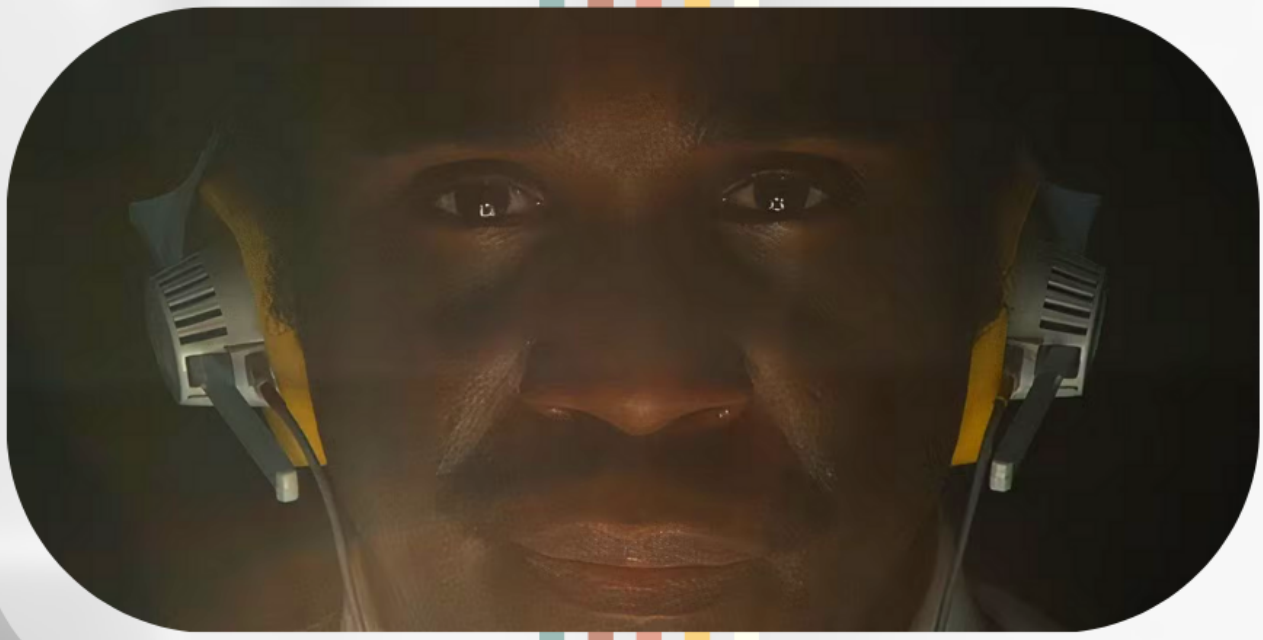
15 minutes after I return, I am told:

Trent and Chelsea from HR would like to speak to you in the basement.



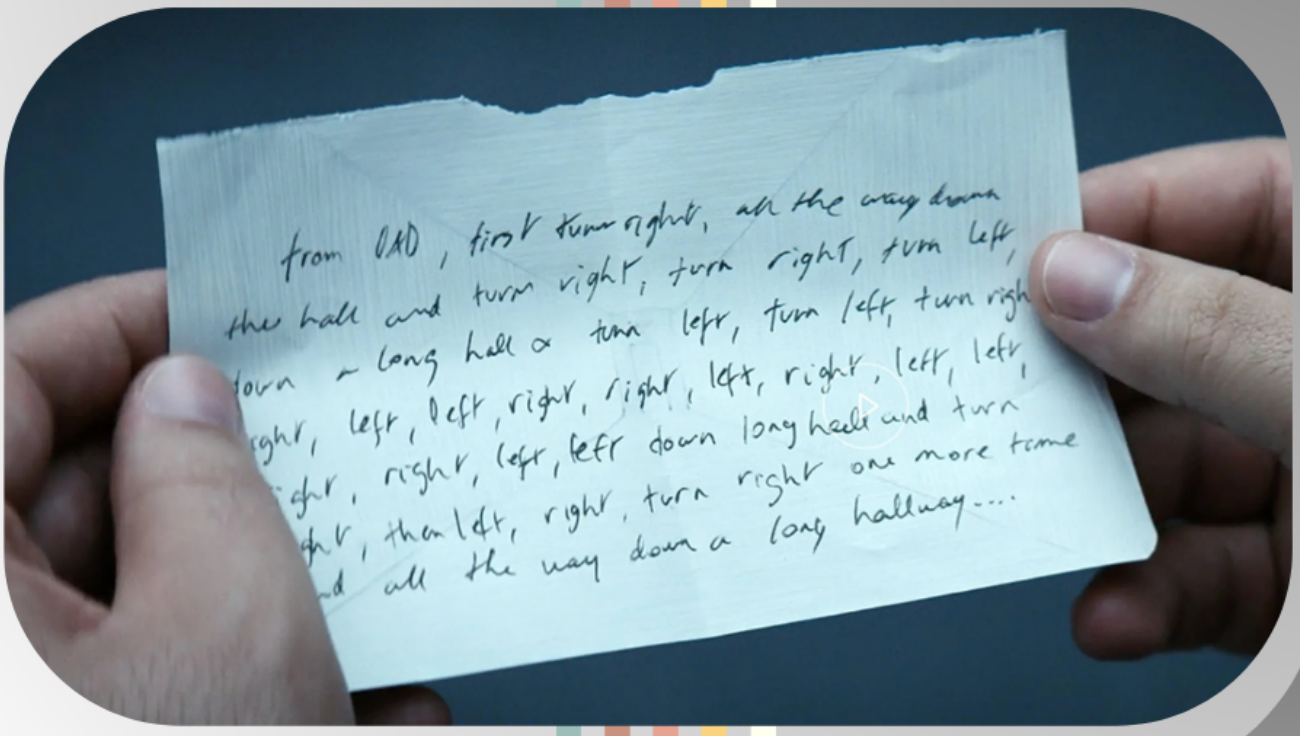
I spent three hours in that basement.

The woman who sent me there has
the company's colors tattooed on her.



STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

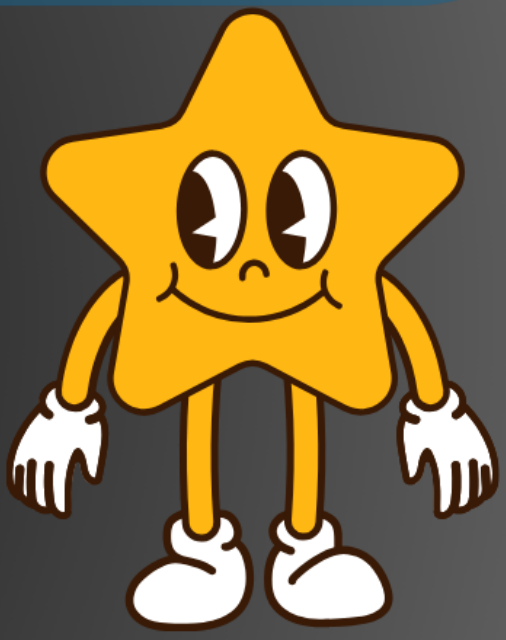
IN THIS VOLUME, I TELL YOU ABOUT THE AFTERMATH OF DISTRIBUTING MY TERMINATION LETTER.

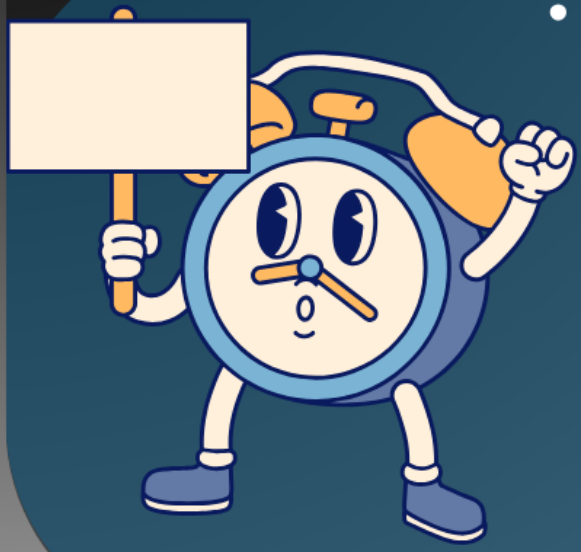

from DAD, first turn right, all the way down
the hall and turn right, turn right, turn left,
down a long hall & turn left, turn left, turn righ
right, left, left, right, right, left, right, left, left,
right, right, left, left down long hall and turn
right, then left, right, turn right one more time
and all the way down a long hallway....

This Severance Package has the following purposes:

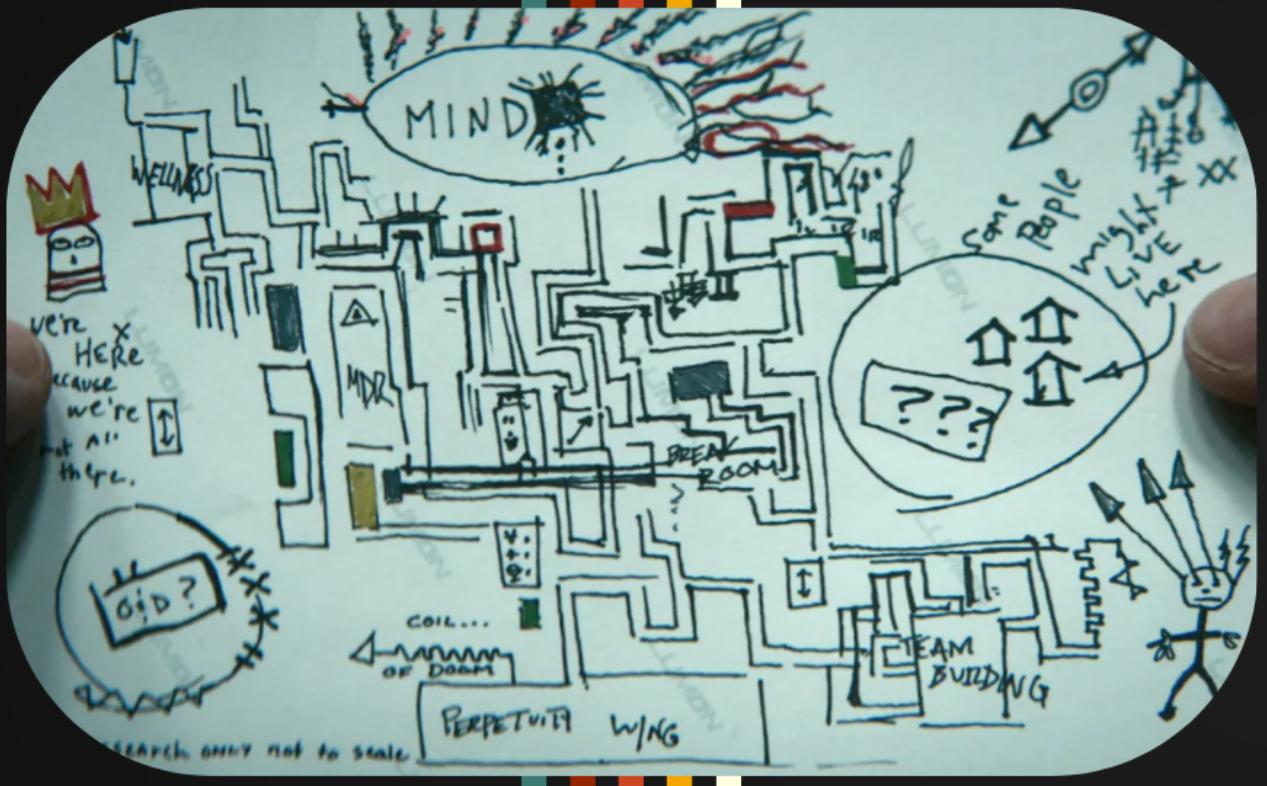
- To tell you what happened afterwards, at least as an entertaining story. In other words, spill tea.

- To show you how I responded to the company's behavior - where I succeeded in showing strength, and where weakness got to me





- To give you strategies to handle backlash from speaking up in your own workplace - strategies I either implemented in my situation, or strategies I should have implemented but didn't.


MIND
WELLNESS
Some People might LIVE here
we're HERE because we're not all there.
??
BREAK ROOM
COIL... OF DOOM
TEAM BUILDING
PERPETUITY W/NG

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IN THE BASEMENT

When you are called into the basement, I need you to remember - **you have a choice**.

You have a choice whether to go or not to go, and most importantly, you get to choose and set the dynamic of the conversation that happens in that room.

If you go in feeling guilty or seeing yourself as lesser than, like a child about to be scolded, then what happens there is you being scolded. If you go in knowing you did the right thing, ready to go into battle for it, then what will happen there is a battle.

That doesn't mean they won't TRY to scold or belittle you though.

As I went down those narrow carpeted stairs, I saw my **department manager Trent** and the **HR representative Chelsea** waiting for me, each on their own couch.

In the upcoming conversations, Trent and Chelsea will be denoted under the following icons:

T C

Hour 1

Questioning and denial

T

Could you tell us why you did what you did? What were you hoping to achieve? We're doing everything we can, so what more do you want us to do? **What do you want ME to do?**

And why does the rest of the team need to know about this?

me

I'm trying to make people understand that whatever is happening right now is NOT enough, and **to think about their situations**. If their situations don't need this hardcore advocacy, that's okay, they can throw this out and they don't need to think about it anymore.

But if there is somebody who is in a vulnerable position, like I was, I wanted people **to at least see a precedent for advocating for themselves**, and **for those people to have someone who would advocate for them**. I want people to know that right now that is not the case, and that there's room for improvement.

I spoke about how I have tried so many times to speak to leadership and HR about it, and that no one listened; how this was the last thing I could possibly do.

I did not feel comfortable giving you feedback. I did not feel comfortable taking even more, and more, and more, initiative. I have reached that limit. If I saw more initiative in addressing how the HR team has treated me in the past, if I didn't end up being the one who has to initiate these things, I would have felt more comfortable giving that feedback. But I'm just saying that from my personal experience, I did not get an indication that there was a genuine attempt to help things.

It honestly just felt like “we’re gonna have these meetings, we’re gonna put a Band-Aid over this, and if YOU want to set up these meetings, and if YOU want to take more initiative and do that, then you do that.” And by that point, when you’re already so demoralized, when you have been shut down so many times? You need to understand that **I can’t keep doing that**.
So I did not feel comfortable talking to you [Trent]. I did not feel comfortable talking to [the middle manager]. I did NOT feel comfortable talking to you.

You know, I could have told people individually how all of that went. But I thought that this would be more effective and less disruptive. Because again, there’s no space for me to do that to address that during [the conference].

T

You're right, **there's not space for that here**, because we're flown people in, spent thousands of dollars to talk about the existential crisis we're in in our industry, and to solve that collective together.

The business challenge that I'm talking about is why we brought people here.

me

I understand. **I don't think talking about the business part of this is enough**. That is what I mean by "it feels dehumanizing" and "it feels like not treating people as people, but treating people as business assets".

T

I'm sorry you feel that way. **The reality is, I am an employee of this company.** [Chelsea] is an employee of this company. We work for this company in order to bring value to this company, in order **to bring value to our clients.** That's the purpose of us being here, that's why our clients pay us to do the work that we're doing.

“Helly,
I watched your video asking that I resign.
I also received and responded to your previous request. I assumed that would resolve the issue, but now Ms. Cobel says you threatened to cut off your fingers?
I understand that you’re unhappy with the life that you’ve been given.
But you know what? Eventually, we all have to accept reality.”

me

But we are also people and when a company has the influence to affect someone's personal life, safety, the resources they have access to, the lines get blurred. And I understand that, again, the purpose of this is to make sure that the company survives, and that people inside it can thrive, that we can be helpful to the clients, and the reason the company exists is to do that through business.

But when the stakes increase? After a certain point, it's not just business. These are also things that affect people on a personal level and when you have a group of people trying to be productive, trying to do the best work that they can, just treating it as a business transaction and not in terms of labor and work that people are doing and what they're getting back, that's not enough.

T

I think it's a **mischaracterization** of me and the way that I treat people to say this is this cold calculated environment. I don't think any of the conversations I've had with you and any conversations I've had with my reports show that. It would be reflected in my 360 feedback, which it has not been - that I'm treating them like interchangeable cogs. **That characterization is just not true against me.**

I did not feel treated like a person.

me

C

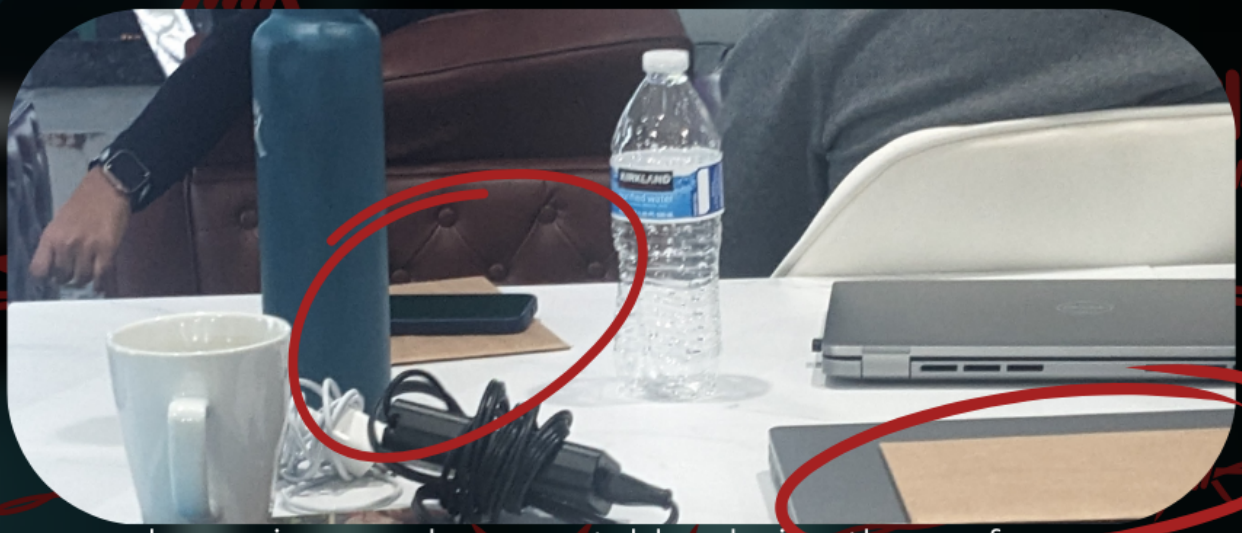
That is your opinion and I'm sorry that you feel that way. But that is not what, to [Trent]'s point, we are doing.

When I tried telling them that 360 feedback is NOT enough to capture people's feelings about you as a leader, they said 'absence of evidence does not make a point'. When I was sitting there right in front of them, a live example saying they did a shitty thing to me, WHILE they are doing a shitty thing to me, they say that this is just my opinion. I know I was not ready with a response for that, and I still don't know how to make people stop denying what is blatantly in front of their eyes.

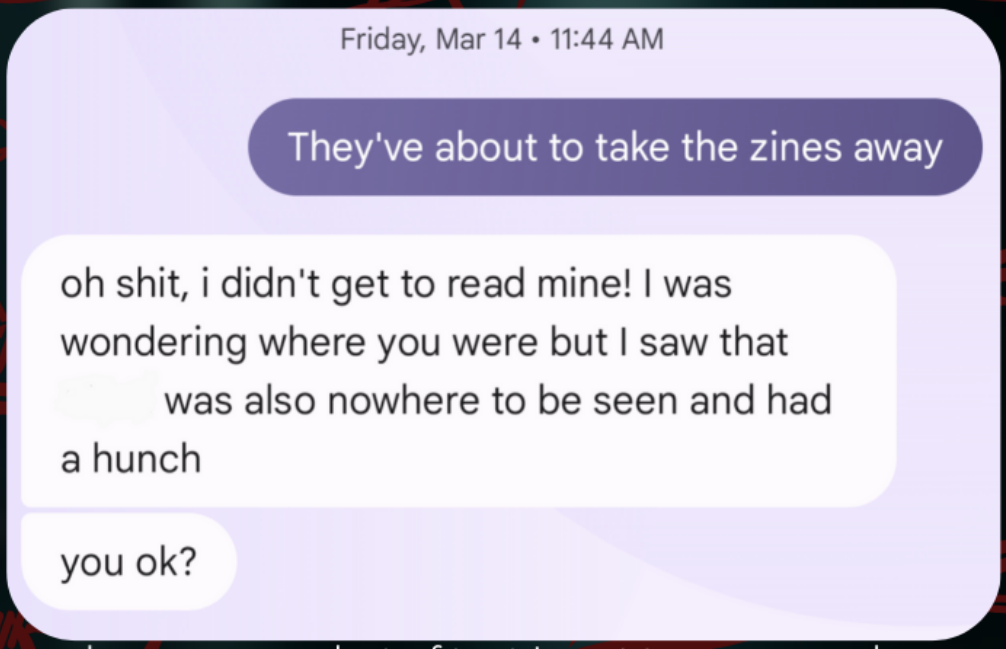
Confiscation, lies and threats

Here is what I meant by 'you have a choice of whether to go into the basement or not'.

While I was in the basement for that first half an hour, the company-tattooed employee was upstairs collecting the zines from people who left them on the tables to focus on the conference. So, what they REALLY did was lure me into the basement to isolate me and not let me stop the confiscation. When I heard that they were going to collect the zines, I shot a quick text to a coworker saying 'they're about to collect the zines'. I then offered HR to go collect the zines myself, but they said it's too late, "the zines were already collected". I now realize that was a lie, because my coworker still had her zine when I sent her that text.



above: zine envelopes on tables during the conference


Friday, Mar 14 • 11:44 AM
They've about to take the zines away
oh shit, i didn't get to read mine! I was wondering where you were but I saw that was also nowhere to be seen and had a hunch
you ok?

above: screenshot of text I sent to my coworker

When I requested my zines to be given back to me, I was told that HR and the IT team will be checking all the chats and communications between me and other people in the company, and if they find that any piece of text in the zine was copy-and-pasted from the company communications, the zines automatically become company property, and will not be returned to me.

me

So, proprietary conversations like...?

C

Anything that is done over [company] email and [company] chat, even if just a hello, belongs to [the company].

When I say that nothing in this zine was copied from written interactions, because none of the promises made to me were in writing (which is a part of the problem!), the HR person takes a pause and says:

C

The conversations that are verbal are also considered sensitive and confidential. That could be something we would need to keep and not get back to you.

I still don't know if what they did is fully legal - for example, **what the standard for confidentiality is (if my coworkers aren't allowed to know about conversations I've had, but HR is allowed to read my and my coworkers' texts without our consent)**. I still don't know **if what the company did is theft**, especially considering their later admission that the department manager and the HR person did not even fully read the zine. But I have a feeling that not everything they did is entirely allowed.

Hour 2

Reprimands and accusations

When the HR person left to make a phone call, I was left alone with the department manager. The one-on-one conversation began with reprimands and accusations that I distributed the zines with the **malicious intent of disrupting the entire conference**.

Trent told me that because I distributed the zine in the beginning of the day, it meant that **I meant to disrupt the conference** - even though I told people explicitly to read it later. He said that even if I assumed people wouldn't read it right away, it was a naive assumption and likely was me just trying to take advantage of people's natural curiosity and inability to hold themselves back from opening the 'mysterious brown envelope', even though most people didn't (judging by my zines mailed back to me being still enclosed in unbroken envelopes).

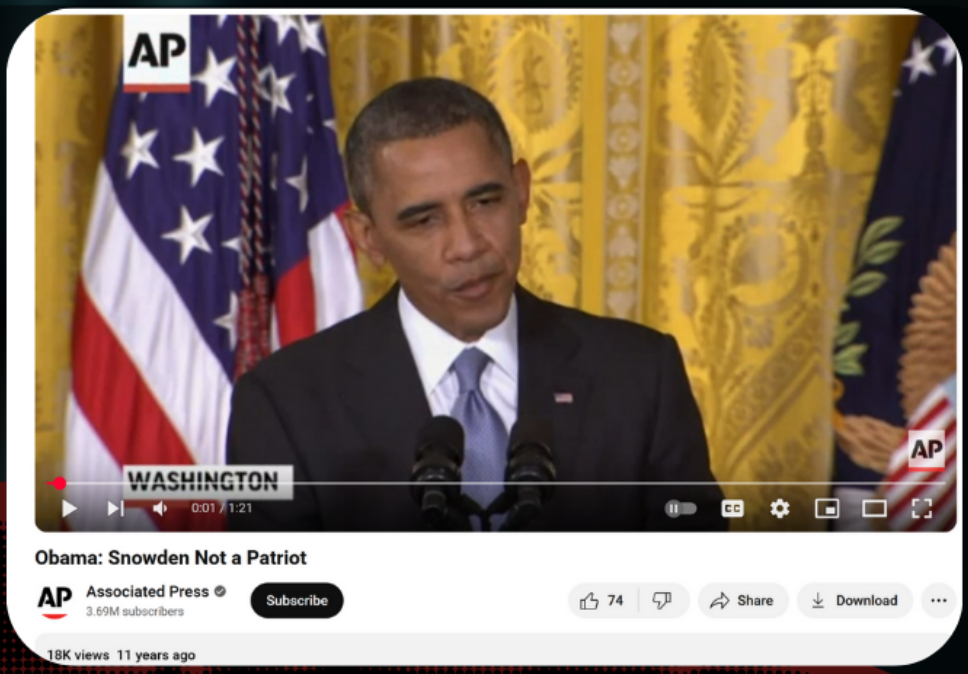
He said that judging by my actions, **I intentionally disrupted the conference and now because of me, the whole year of strategic planning for the department is ruined because he is not up there right now strategizing with the rest of the team.** Even though, my guy, we're only here because you intervened.

Those accusations did make me think. Apart from the stances I took in my zine, so many of my decisions at the conference up until then have been instinctual. I didn't weigh all the pros and cons of distributing the zine in the beginning of the day or in the end, all I saw was all my coworkers finally in one room together, and I made the move.

"It is kind of an unusual feeling, that is hard to describe or convey in words, but not knowing what's going to happen the next day, the next hour, the next week... it's scary, but at the same time it's liberating. You know, the planning comes a lot easier because you don't have that many variables to take into play. You can only act and then act again." -Edward Snowden, Citizenfour

Nonetheless, when faced with these kinds of judgments, when having words put in my mouth, **I did question myself and my intentions.**

Did I hope deep inside me that people would read it and start a mini-riot on my behalf? If it did happen, and people did start yelling at the leadership right there in that room, would I not find it even a little bit entertaining? And the thing is, I may not have had those intentions then, but now that those words are put in my mouth, portraying me as this master manipulator, it was so tempting not to embrace it.



“No, I don’t think Mr. Snowden was a patriot. As I said in my opening remarks, I called for a thorough review of our surveillance operations before Mr. Snowden made these leaks. My preference -- and I think the American people’s preference -- would have been for a lawful, orderly examination of these laws, a thoughtful fact-based debate that would then lead us to a better place.

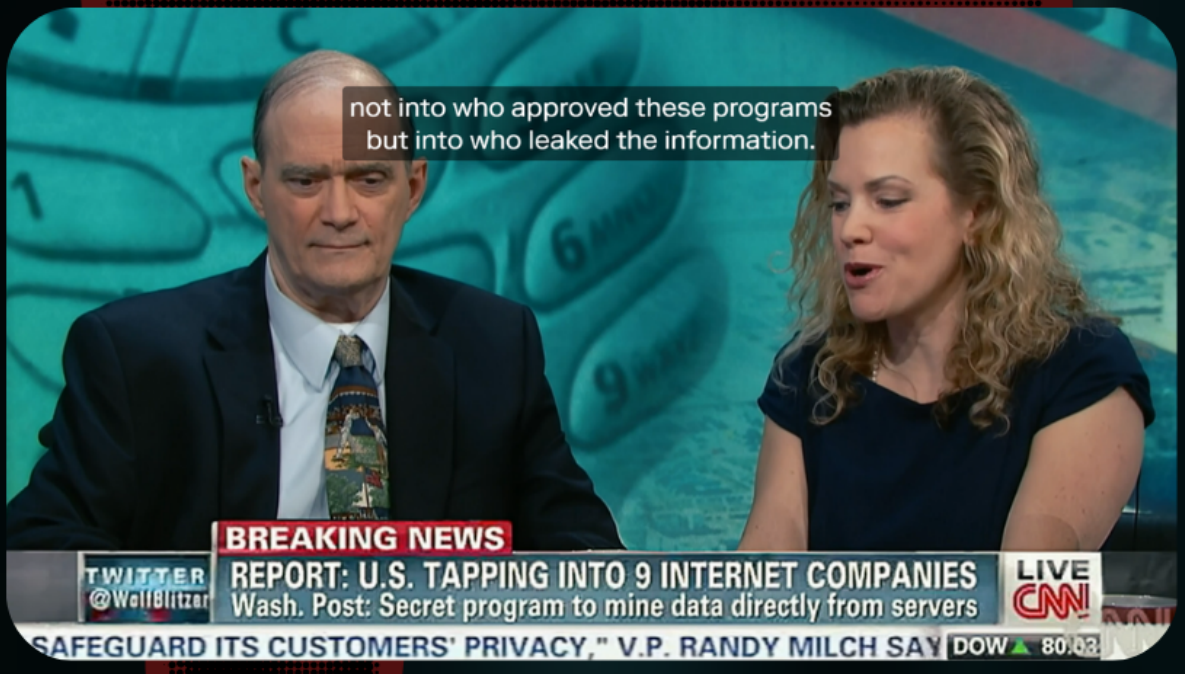
Mr. Snowden has been charged with three felonies. If, in fact, he believes that what he did was right, then, like every American citizen, he can come here, appear before the court with a lawyer and make his case.

If the concern was that somehow this was the only way to get this information out to the public, I signed an executive order well before Mr. Snowden leaked this information that provided whistleblower protection to the intelligence community -- for the first time. So there were other avenues available for somebody whose conscience was stirred and thought that they needed to question government actions.” - Barack Obama, 2013

In reality, I know that my calculations were pretty simple. Bad treatment of employees = people need to know. People all in the same room = give them the zines. And maybe that was a miscalculation. Maybe I did freak out and not think about the consequences.

Talking to my department manager, I realized that because I distributed the zine in the beginning of the day, that caused the **chain reaction** of him feeling like he "had" to call HR, because he also has a boss he is trying to please, who will be furious if he found out that the department manager didn't stop this.

Even though again, why would he be furious at me for saying something, instead of being furious at this mistreatment happening in the first place?


not into who approved these programs
but into who leaked the information.
BREAKING NEWS
TWITTER
@WolfBlitzer
REPORT: U.S. TAPPING INTO 9 INTERNET COMPANIES
Wash. Post: Secret program to mine data directly from servers
LIVE
CNN
SAFEGUARD ITS CUSTOMERS' PRIVACY," V.P. RANDY MILCH SAY
DOW 80.03

"I have no doubt that the administration will launch an investigation not into who approved these programs, but into who leaked the information."
Jesselyn Radack, attorney for the NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden

Breaking down slowly

Even though I had a comeback to everything thrown at me, it was still a lot, and I started crying.

I cried from the pressure, the questioning, the assignment of my intentions to me, the entire thing feeling like it's falling apart and I'm at fault for it, me having 'broken the trust' and not being clever enough to figure out how to redeem the situation or get out of this check-mate to ultimately allow people to read the zines.

When I said I'd show you where weakness got to me, this is what I mean. Not to shame it, but to show you that it is human, and that it's a lot, and that if you're at that point, it's okay if all you can do is survive and learn for next time.

The shift

I'm sorry that I messed stuff up. For you and for other people. — **me**

I apologized and owned up to my actions many more times in those hours. Whether I took more responsibility in the conversation than I should have, whether it was a show of weakness or not, it also had a helpful effect - one that I hoped it would have.

Even though all of this was happening, even though I was the one being reprimanded and scolded and told how I just ruined everyone's year, even though my department manager was technically the 'big boss man' telling me things like:

T — YOU did this.
There are actions and consequences.

...once I calmed myself down and looked up, he suddenly seemed... shrunk.

One way or another, somehow during our conversation, half of his facade fell.

While telling me things like: You broke our trust.

He also started saying things like:

I understand that you feel that the HR team also broke your trust...

When he was asking me why I had to give people a printed copy, he used the term **“physical artifact”**, which is a term you only learn from reading material and courses that emphasize the importance and significance of physical artifacts - **meaning that he did that reading, or went to those courses, and had at least a concept of why it’s important to me.**

When I asked him, like a person, what should I have done? Like, brainstorm with me, help me learn, how could I have done this so that this right now wouldn’t happen? Surprisingly, he did contribute ideas. Mail it to people, find people’s personal email addresses and send them an electronic copy, **make a video**. Just the fact that he was even engaging in that brainstorming, **which he admitted he can only do because HR isn’t there**, shows that there is at least a **GLIMMER of understanding, a GLIMMER of humanity there**.
As small of a crumb as it is, it’s a little win for me.

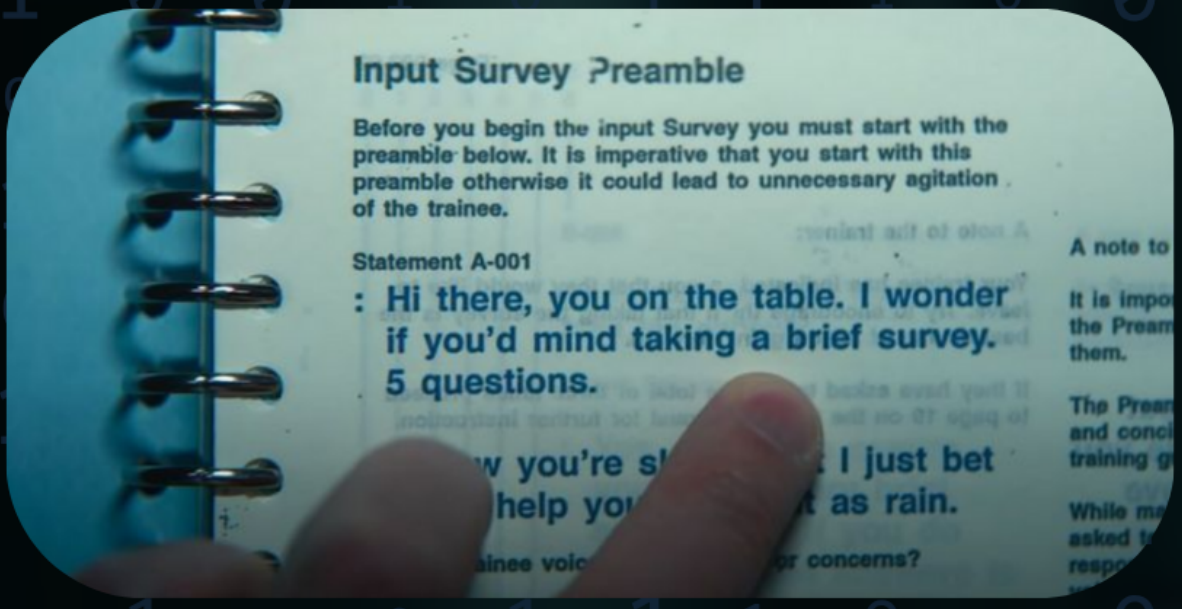
And even though it wasn’t enough to compel him to do the right thing (which would have been to give the zines back to people), let me tell you, **I’ve never seen a department manager,** a 6-foot tall grown man, **shrink down to a seated fetal position while talking to me**. No way that would have happened if that conversation had zero effect on him.

Hour 3

The survey

When the HR rep Chelsea returned from her phone call, and Trent went upstairs to get back to the conference, I requested a conversation with her one-on-one.

This was no longer an attempt to get HR to change their mind, but an attempt to appeal to Chelsea as a person, and if that fails, at least to explore the HR psyche and for me to learn the logic that drives the corporate structure.


Input Survey Preamble
Before you begin the input Survey you must start with the preamble below. It is imperative that you start with this preamble otherwise it could lead to unnecessary agitation of the trainee.
Statement A-001
: Hi there, you on the table. I wonder if you'd mind taking a brief survey. 5 questions.
A note to

In this 'survey', I attempted to explore the following 5 questions:

1. Why, in the grand scheme of things, is my action of advocacy considered 'inappropriate'?
2. How are the terms 'professional' vs. 'unprofessional' defined?
3. Who and what defines these terms?
4. Why did 'professionalism' and 'what is appropriate' come before giving me space for advocacy for myself and other workers at this company?
5. Is there a justified, deliberate, logically sound, and consistent philosophy that guides this HR department?

Argument #1: We don't do this because no one else does this.

me

I'm asking you as a person, because you're a person, who also works in HR, and it's like... **What do I do?**

C

I can't tell you what to do. I will say, you know, I'm new here; so, I'm not talking about [this company] at all right now. But the companies I've worked with? You know, **having that opportunity** and that type of platform to have these conversations **is not something I've really seen**. So when you say, "you know, I feel like I don't have this platform for this, and this space to be able to tell people what I want to be able to tell them" - **in my experience, I haven't seen a platform like that... ever.**

My thoughts now: Okay, so it is not allowed... because it is not allowed? They just repeated my question back to me. That's not a real answer.

Argument #2:
We don't want people to be triggered about their own case.

me

[It's not allowed] to be able to tell a group of people [about this] during a business event?

C

Yeah. It's just not something that's usually discussed. **It makes people uncomfortable.** And I know that you're uncomfortable. And I know that you're hurting. But sometimes these conversations also make other people uncomfortable, **and us as a business, we have to look out for that** too, you know?

me

What do you mean by 'uncomfortable'?

C

Well, for instance, **I know that you shared your specific story**. I'm not sure you've thought about this, but **there could be another person in the house who's experienced a similar situation, and by reading that it could be triggering**.

Okay, so I could put trigger warnings.

me

C

No, even seeing and reading about your case could **trigger back trauma for their own case.**

So, because I mentioned that I'm a victim of domestic abuse?

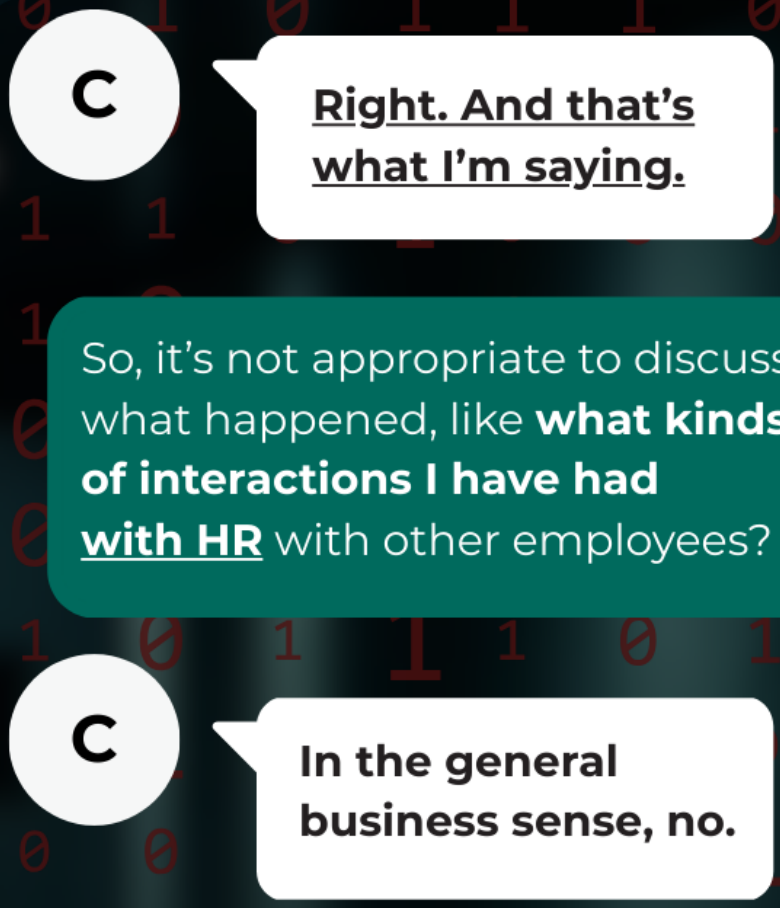
me

C

No-no-no-no-no, I think that you put in **your reasons as to why you are leaving.**

I was describing what HAPPENED.

me


C
Right. And that's what I'm saying.
me
So, it's not appropriate to discuss what happened, like what kinds of interactions I have had with HR with other employees?
C
In the general business sense, no.

My thoughts now: It took me a while to piece this all together. I wish I could make this up. They ADMIT that they're trying to protect people from being triggered, triggered **NOT by reading about the personal abuse I have faced at home, but by reading about the reasons why I am leaving and the treatment I faced at WORK.** They are protecting people because **it may remind them of THEIR OWN CASE**.

What?! How many people are you treating like this that it may re-traumatize them to hear that I am being treated the same way?! THAT may make people uncomfortable? When I asked for clarification, I begged God that this was just a misunderstanding, but she didn't answer. "The woman was too stunned to speak."

Argument #3: We are not a civil rights organization.

During the above-mentioned conversation about triggers, I was told that those 'triggering' conversations **should happen individually**, and we went on this tangent:

me

I'm trying to understand this, but I am having trouble understanding it. Because so many of the civil rights improvements that the U.S. has had, **it wasn't through talking individually.**

C

But we aren't a civil rights organization trying to enact civil rights change.

me

I understand that it's a company that's trying to support its employees.

C

and make revenue through our contracts with our clients.

me

Yes. But I don't think you need to be a civil rights organization in order to have these conversations.

C

It's just not the right platform to do so. I've never been in an organization where a group can sit together and talk about social justice and change.

me

But then, that's kind of counterintuitive, because we have Affinity Groups.

C

Yeah! That's to provide support throughout the organization. It's to bring education, to **provide a safe space**.

C

But those Affinity Groups are not going out there to the government protesting. **They're not trying to get bills passed**, or anything like that with the government, right?

me

I'm also not trying to get bills passed. **I'm just trying to think about company policy** and what the company can do for people. **Because at this point, nobody is going to pass those bills.**

My thoughts now: Companies are now some of the most powerful organizations in America, presenting themselves as the highest version of an organization, as the best and the only structure that we can function under. **If you believe in capitalism, then you believe that companies are the best way for us to be supported as workers.**

But when it actually comes down to even speaking with employees about working conditions, they're suddenly 'not a civil rights organization' or 'not a charity'. Suddenly, no one is 'entitled' to the right to speak and the right to organize.

When someone says ‘we’re not a civil rights organization’ and ‘we’re not trying to go protest the government’ **when I’m talking about basic conversations on company policy**, what it shows me is that they’re either bigoted, or that they can’t hold a train of thought.

Not even having a concept of civil conversations with employees about their working conditions, not being able to even handle the idea of employees speaking as a group, shows me that they have no idea what they’re doing, or they do but cannot say it because they realize how it will sound.

Either way, be it poor logic or bigotry, it involves a lack of basic intelligence or imagination.

Argument #4:
It is inappropriate to talk disparagingly about the business.

me

Is there a worry that if people start talking about this stuff, then it's going to damage the business?

C

No-no-no, not at all. No-no-no-no-no. I was saying, **it's an inappropriate conversation** for two people, or a group of people, **to talk disparagingly about the business.**

me

So how are people supposed to address if there's something-

C

There are egregious things that you can say about the business, and then there is something that might need to... change.

me

So, for example, if someone is facing sexual harassment. And talking like “Oh my god, I’m getting this from my boss and this company, and HR is not doing anything, and this company is covering them up”. **That is talking disparagingly about the business.** But really it’s trying to reach out for help ANYWHERE.

C

Yeah. In that case, I hope that is not a real situation and I’m just going to say this, if that is a real situation, I really hope that that person can talk to me or someone else because that is not okay. Um, I don’t have any tolerance for it whatsoever. Um, I don’t know if it is, we can just say it’s a hypothetical situation for now, but I really would hope that that person would come forward if they already came forward, maybe an investigation was done and nothing was found, I don’t know, but...

C

And...

C

I don't know... I don't know, Yana. **I don't know if I'm gonna be able to clearly verbalize an understanding** of how employees can speak to each other to enact change or just to have support.

me

Yup. That's why. (I wasn't like, trying to make a point with this. So, I won't try to be like, "well, this is why I brought it up, so I'm right." It's not like that.) **Seeing someone who works in HR not know how to answer that question? That is... scary? Heartbreaking?** It's not that you are unqualified or something like that. But I'm just like... that can't be right.

Note: Yes, I was trying to make a point. Yes, that is why I brought it up. Yes, I think not being able to answer these questions is a sign of incompetence. And yes, it is highly hypocritical of me. I just couldn't say it to her face, as I didn't want it to escalate.

C

Every business is different.
Every situation is different.
Every employee is different.

me

Well, so what do we want [this company] to be?

C

I can't answer it.

me

Who can?

C

I don't know if anyone can.

me

So then, who decides these rules, of what is appropriate and what is not?

Because somebody decided that it was not appropriate. So who was it?

My thoughts now:

This is ‘corporate professionalism’.
These are the people who tell you you need to be ‘professional’, or else.

These are the people that present themselves as the ultimate authority and tell you that what they are doing is wrong.
THEY don’t even know what the rules are.
THEY don’t even know what the logic behind those rules is.

And this is not just this company. This is HR as an idea. This is likely your HR.
Have you ever asked them these questions?
Have they ever given you any answer that actually makes sense?

Are these the people you feel are qualified to tell you what is right and wrong?

Are these the people you will allow to make you feel guilty?
Are these the people you will listen to and follow just because they use ‘professionalism’ to cover themselves up?

Friend, wake up. Mutual human respect is one thing. This is something else.

OUT OF THE BASEMENT

The good news is, you and I are not the only ones who have common sense, many others around us do. And believe me, there is power in teaming up with them.

When I came out of that basement, and the presentations were finished, I could see so many understanding looks across the room.

When you do something as polarizing as this, you will see EXACTLY who is with you and who is not. But that's the point.

When I walked through that room full of people, I could see the people averting eye contact, pretending I don't exist, and the people who make and hold that link, giving me a smile and a nod.

I chose to hang back and be socially active, and when I sat in the back of the room to take a breather from the alcohol fumes, **four people came up to me one by one**, and I told them exactly what happened.

At least two people kept their zines, and to others I trust, I gave the leftover copies I kept in my bag.

One man sang me an ancient chant he knew, that started with ya-na, my name.

Later that night, that same man gave me an HOUR LONG pep talk to hype me up and help me feel that I did the right thing.

My favorite quotes from him include:

You made a PAMPHLET....
You made a f*ing pamphlet!!!**

and:

I don't mean it in a misogynistic way at all...
but YOU'VE GOT BALLS DOWN THERE, LADY!!!

More people who couldn't attend the conference contacted me afterwards, **and even their friends wanted to read the zine and hear what happened.**
P.S. I see you. Call me.

All these people, whether I know them or not, helped me get through this grueling experience and come out so much less traumatized than I could have.

Just finding those four more people who understand me on that visceral level made it all worth it.

That is EXACTLY what I was hoping for, and I got it!

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

Looking back, I did something,
I got in trouble for it, and I don't regret it.
I have learned a lot from it.

Looking forward, the most important thing I ultimately hope you take away from this, is that **there is no justification or moral reason for oppression.**

America, religion, the American Dream - they love to make us suffer, but at least make us suffer for a reason. What I saw from this experience is that there IS NO REASON.

There is no grand structure or machine that knows better than us, there is no comeback or argument that will ever make sense for why we should be mistreated.

There is, ultimately, nothing anyone can say that should convince us that we deserve this.

THAT is something that will never make sense,
THAT is something you should never fall for.
No matter who tells it to you, or how.

If what you do with that information is make your own little (or medium) act of rebellion, here are some strategies you can put in your arsenal. These strategies can be used to prepare for the action, or to handle the backlash to it:

1

Think before going into an isolated place for a ‘talk’. Be prepared for it to be a bait to lure you away from the rest of the group. Go only if you are ready and accept any actions that may be taken when you’re away.

2

Don’t believe everything they say, including that something is ‘already done’. They may tell you things to scare and demotivate you, but there may still be something you can do.

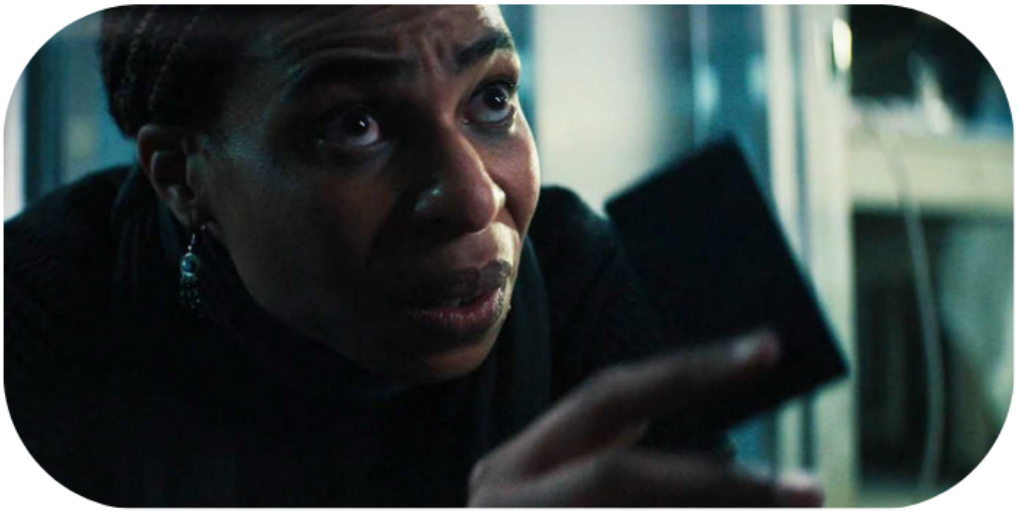
3

When in doubt, negotiate.
I am still glad I tried to negotiate to collect the zines myself. I also asked for the zines back, and I received them in the mail two weeks later.

4

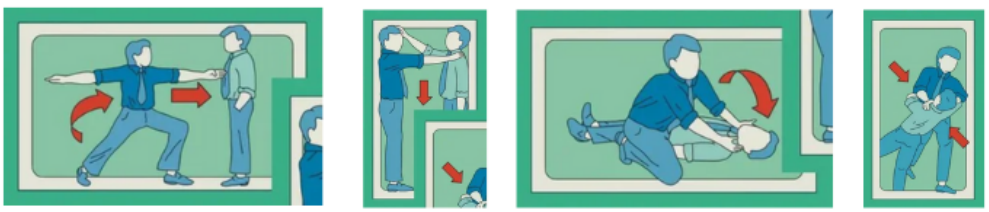
Find lawyers to chat with.

If you suspect you may end up in a situation with unclear rules and abusive corporate regulations (e.g., confiscated property, chat search, etc.), and if you know any lawyers, ask them for advice. If you can arm yourself with legal knowledge, do it, because that will make threats less effective towards you.



5

Think through the chain reactions your action will cause depending on its time and method. Be prepared for immediate company intervention, and have a backup plan (e.g., backup envelopes, physically stopping the confiscation yourself, asking people not to give back the envelopes, asking your closest colleagues to step in during the intervention if needed). Maybe if I distributed the zines at the end of the day, then it wouldn't be as blatantly 'on company time', maybe it would be easier to overlook, maybe it would be harder to reach HR, and maybe they wouldn't have enough time to collect it all back. Or maybe, I'd miss my chance at all.



6

Know that your choices and results will never be clear-cut. You will always be told that you are in the wrong, and because the person telling you this is your boss, backed by HR and the entire company, it will be difficult to defend yourself and every micro-action you took.

7

In my opinion, it's okay to cry if you need to. Crying happens for different reasons, like caving under pressure, or getting emotional from passion while making your point. As long as you get yourself back together, it will be okay. No matter what this system wants you to be, we are not machines, and that's part of the point that we're trying to make here. So, when fighting to be treated like a human, treat yourself like a human too.

8

Understand that there is a possibility for failure, just like there is a possibility for success. You may not “win” this time, but it doesn’t mean that it’s not worth doing. **See this as a learning experience, a practice ground, and a way to prepare for future, even more difficult battles.** Having that mindset, rather than thinking in all-or-nothing, will help lower the stakes and keep you composed even in the roughest times. Trust me, I am not a debate bro, I am not even a native English speaker, but this helped me stay composed and calm, which in turn helped me handle the situation better than I thought I ever could.

9

Think through your definition of ‘success’ for your action.

The reason I said you will “lose” in my previous point is because if your metric of success is immediate change in the company, then you may be disappointed. But if your metric of success is doing something difficult, or providing a punishment/push-back response to the company (aka pissing them, making them think twice before pulling something like this again), or building connections in the process, then you are more likely to come out feeling empowered. Choose your goals wisely - be realistic, but don’t be a doomer.

10

Try appealing to their humanity individually, if doing so in a group does not work. For example, without HR there, it may be easier to appeal to the manager's human side, since they won't need to put up the appearance of a strong authoritative leader. And the other way around, it may be easier to break the HR-speak barrier when no one else is there to witness it.

11

When appealing to the human aspect, **take responsibility**, **be empathetic to their unique pressure to perform**, **and remind them that they can still do the right thing**. Even if they still choose not to, you still plant a seed that will quietly tell them the truth at the back of their mind when they go to sleep at night.

12

Remember, you don't need to be afraid of these people. They may pose as big and important, and they may even use big words, but if their points are used to ultimately mistreat and oppress people, then they don't have any solid ground or foundation. Again, there is NO truly valid justification for oppression, and you should never forget that. If they are choosing silence and oppression, if they haven't figured out how to work with people without subjugating them, they're not actually that smart. Trust yourself in that.

13

If you're somehow not kicked out from doing what you did, and if you feel safe, **hang back for a bit longer**. **Use that time to see who is with you.** Allow people to approach you, allow for natural open conversation, which, if you're on the same page, can lead to very valuable discussions. And even before you do something like this, try getting to know your coworkers. If you have that opportunity, you can also consider doing things (including rebellious things) outside of work. I didn't have that opportunity, but if I did, that would be a whole another world of possibilities.

I don't know about you,
but I will never believe in

~~There is~~

~~nothing~~

~~we~~

~~can~~

~~do~~

Eventually, every person reading this zine will need to make the decision of whether to push for change or join those who benefit from things remaining the same. While we all struggle with different types of pressures to perform, each of us still has the choice to do the right thing - whether to stand up for those mistreated, or not.

Doing so may look different for each of us - everyone is presented with their own set of choices.
And you may not be able to do the exact same thing that I did,

but you WILL be presented with an opportunity to do something ballsy, in your own way.

And you want to be ready.

I also want you to understand that even if your efforts go over the heads of most people you intend to reach, **there WILL be someone who will take notice**

- be it other people on the same page with you, or people you oppose, who will be too bitter to forget.

As the chanting man told me, **the leadership will be TOO CURIOUS** not to see what you did, hear what you said, or read what you wrote - that's just human nature. And when they do, even if they disagree with 99% of things you said, **they will see that there is truth to what you're saying**, and it will sting. And that's what you want.

Not only are you **finding new allies** who are on the same page with you, but you are also creating a Skinner's rat response in leadership showing that **if they mistreat people, there WILL be consequences**.

Do you think they EVER want to get a pamphlet like that again? Trust me, they don't.

The price you pay by burning bridges with some, will be the due you pay to protect others. And you will be paying for it with hardship, threat of unemployment, uncertain job prospects, and self-doubt.

The chanting man would tell you that you will keep paying for what you did, until someone out there benefits from what you have done. That's when that good will come back to you, and you will know when it happens.

I am of the belief that you may never find out the impact of what you did, but there is something of a comforting mystery about it.

In my Termination Letter, I wrote that I didn't want to be a rumor. That I wanted everyone to know exactly what happened.

But now, even after everything, I am likely still just a rumor. And if you do something like this, you may end up being just a rumor too.

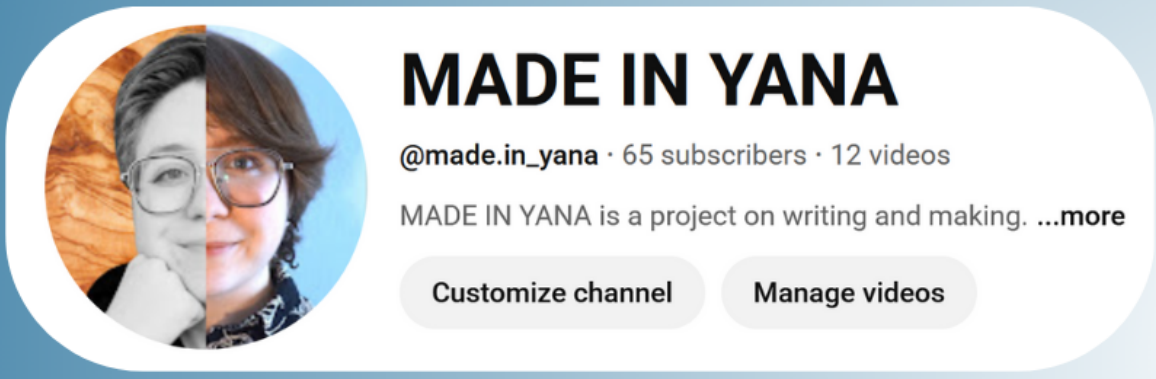
But with time, we will learn how to be more than that - a big enough rumor to become a story, a piece of news, a paragraph in a textbook, a Wikipedia page, an NSA profile - **anything we want**. While 'just a rumor' right now, we now have a clearer view of how to grow, we have a trajectory forward.

We will learn how to get our message out there more effectively. We will learn how to know who will try to stop us and who will help us. We will learn how to set backup plans and create diversions so that the people who need to have the information actually get it. We will learn to take the wins and cut the losses. We will learn how to keep up morale and stir up curiosity. We will learn, we will learn, we will learn.

MR. MILCHICK!

"Civil disobedience is not our problem. Our problem is civil obedience. Our problem is that people all over the world have obeyed the dictates of leaders...and millions have been killed because of this obedience... Our problem is that people are obedient all over the world in the face of poverty and starvation and stupidity, and war, and cruelty." - Howard Zinn

YouTube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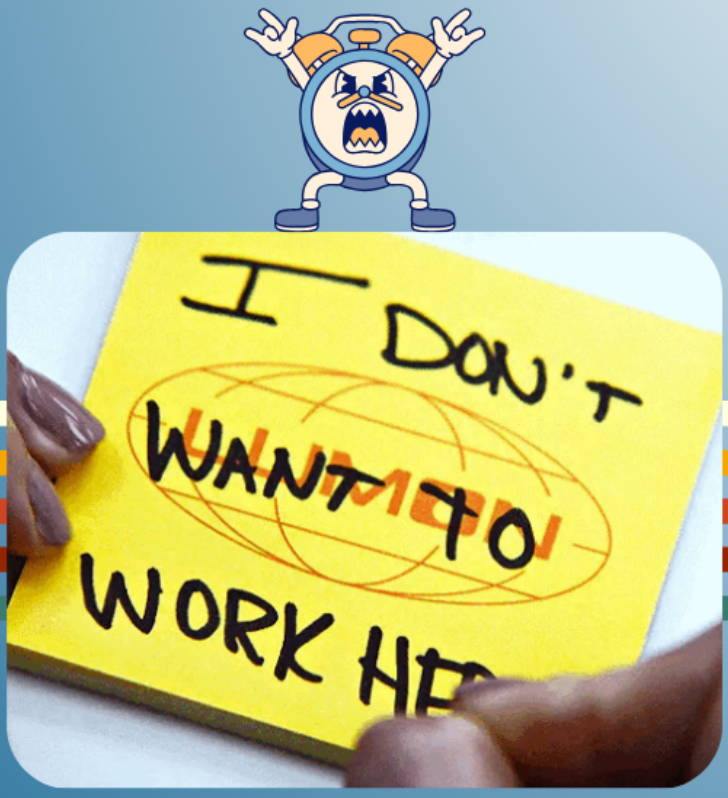
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